

Oh, how easy it is to say, "We will."

You are at the altar, getting married. You are asked to be with the other person through joys and hardships and until death you shall not part. You are young. In your mind the future reaches out-a few months, a year perhaps. Without considering all the ups and downs, and often endings to the marriage experience, you enthusiastically say, "I will."

You want a child. You ignore all the warnings of sleepless nights, tantrums of a two-year old, defiant rebellion of a teenager, and normal worries of a parent, and say, "We will."

You love the house you are shown. It is a bit beyond the budget. But you love the house-oh those views! Are we willing to eat rice and beans for five years and not go on vacation for the next eight years-to pay this big mortgage? With stars in your eyes, you say, "We will."

When I was ready to retire from the Scottsdale Police Dept I was asked to sit in on interviews for my replacement. Oh, people really liked the sound of this job-good health benefits and exciting work with the police. I asked, are you willing to sacrifice time with your family, be tied to a pager, get up at 2 in the morning to respond to a suicide, and intervene in other people's messes? They quickly said, "We will."

Sometimes we quickly say, "We will" without weighing what that means.

Today in the Gospel of Mark we read of an interesting conversation between Jesus and two of his followers, James and John. They approach Jesus and pose a fairly bold demand. **"Teacher, we want you to do for us whatever we ask of you."** In other words, "Jesus-give us what we want." That kind of makes you wake up and sit back.

My guess is that Jesus inwardly cringes, but patiently says, **"What is it you want me to do for you?"** They say, well we want to sit next to you, on the right and on the left, when you enter into your glory. Jesus says-do you know what you are asking. Are you able to drink the cup that I drink or be baptized with the baptism that I am baptized with? And here we go with the quick, impulsive reply: **"We are able."**

Okay, Jesus says, come with me on my journey, but about all that sitting on some throne next to me in glory, let that go. It's out of my hands.

Just like the blindness and short-sighted decisions we make about houses, jobs, and such-all the "we wills" we blurt out-so it is with these disciples.

Of course, as it is in our life, when one or two people start manipulating for position and status, and others find out, it creates a mess. Scripture says that the ten other disciples overheard this little conversation and then got angry with James and John. Hey, no one likes to see someone else cozying up to the boss, trying to get favors.

So Jesus sets the record straight. He says, to effect, -I get it. You want to be great. And now the rest of you are throwing fits because these two are trying to worm themselves into the good chairs. But, he says, look at the world. In "the world" people get big jobs and then they lord it over all the others. They

often become tyrants. It is human nature. But if you follow me, this will **not be so among you**. Whoever wishes to be “great” must be a servant. To be first, you must become a slave of all. If you want to be like me, you are called not to be served, but to serve.

I wonder if they still were so enthusiastic then. Maybe the enthusiastic “we will” should have been more of a “let me think about this a minute.” But that is okay. Let’s give James and John a bit of grace here. I have often thought of church baptism services. At one point in the service the congregation is asked if they will pray for this child as they grow up. There is always an enthusiastic “we will” in unison. But I wonder how many follow through with daily and yearly prayers for the person whose baptism they witnessed. How honest is that “we will”? I also remember our son Jay and the end of his catechism training. He went through it all and when it came time to join the church with his confirmation-and agree to follow church doctrine and follow Jesus-all the other students said, “we will.” But he said, “well, I cannot in conscience agree to all this at this time and I have more questions, so I will turn down my confirmation right now.” It was my intern year as a pastor-at that church- in a small Iowa town. I initially felt somewhat embarrassed, but then was proud of him. He saw following Jesus and being a committed member of a church as a commitment so large that he felt he could not give the easy “I will” answer.

Yes, it is a commitment. That is the simple truth. But if you serve others, then in Jesus’ eyes, you are great. But not the world’s sense of greatness. Always remember that. This was the problem with John and James. They were thinking that they had already sacrificed things in their life-and they had, it is true- and now it was time for the reward. The nice position, the comfortable pillow. The honored position. I laugh as I was reminded of a couple from a church I served in Wisconsin. They always sat in the same third pew, week after week. One day they brought in puffy cushions to sit on. I asked them what that was for- and the woman said that if they were going to have to come to church and listen to what Jesus had to say-and sometimes these were hard sayings, they might as well be comfortable.

Jesus says in today’s Gospel that he came **to serve, not be served**. And to follow him is to do the same. I often talk to people in this congregation who are serving as servants to others, in their own non-spectacular way, and I hear over and over what a joy it is. Not some burden, but a joy. And Jesus did say elsewhere that his yoke is easy, the burden light. Others have found that following Jesus brought hardships and pain, and sometimes death. History has taught us that. Jesus’ cup and Jesus’ baptism takes us on roads that are painful as well as joyful.

I call you to just keep being faithful in your own way. Just keep on handing out food on Fridays at the St. Luke’s food pantry; keep on calling on people who are having difficulties. Keep on taking the Holy Eucharist to those who cannot come to community worship; keep on praying for others; and especially in this interim period at St. Luke’s, keep on working together in your often quiet ways, in Jesus’ name, to serve each other and the larger community.

Keep doing it quietly, joyfully. I don’t know if you will get the best seats in glory and be sitting on soft pillows next to Jesus-but who knows? Jesus says that is not his call. But at least when Jesus asks, “**Will you follow me? Will you open your servant heart?**” -I pray that you can answer-not impulsively, but thoughtfully and prayerfully, “**We will.**” Amen